

University of Maryland in January 2006, 80 percent of the Iraqis believe we do have plans to establish permanent military bases. And an astounding 92 percent of the Sunni Arabs believe this to be true.

These widespread suspicions contribute to the violence against American military personnel in Iraq, in my view. Why do Iraqis believe we want permanent bases? Why do they think we should subject ourselves to the enormous ongoing costs in Iraq? Do they think we want their sand? No, I think they think we want their oil.

According to a 2004 Pew Charitable Trust international survey on the American invasion of Iraq, all four Muslim states surveyed, including Turkey, Pakistan, Jordan, and Morocco, expressed overwhelming suspicion about the stated reasons for America's invasion of Iraq. Majorities in each of the countries believe that control of Mideast oil was an important factor in our invasion.

If you believe, as I do, that we need a regional strategy in Iraq to tackle growing sectarianism, allaying these suspicions is critical. It is critical to winning the battle for the hearts and minds of 1.2 billion Muslims in the world.

Those who have been to Iraq, as I have—and I know the men and women in the Senate have—everyone here knows these rumors to be unfounded, to be untrue. It is not our intention to control their oil. It also is not who we are.

However, that is not what the people of the Muslim world think. Before we quickly dismiss these fears as ludicrous, remember what the Iraqis have been through in three decades: Three wars and a tyrannical regime that turned paranoia into a way of life, turned neighbor against neighbor, friend against friend, brother against brother.

And remember the longer history of Iraq in the region which is ingrained in the Iraqi psyche: 400 years of British and Ottoman occupation have, to put it mildly, led to certain suspicions about foreign presence.

As CENTCOM Commander GEN John Abizaid testified before the Committee on Armed Services last September:

We must make clear to the people of the region we have no designs on their territory or resources.

The amendment of mine that has been accepted will have no detrimental effect on the military operations of our Armed Forces in Iraq or their ability to provide security for Iraqi oil infrastructure.

The U.N. Council Resolution 1546 recognizes that the American and coalition forces are present in Iraq at the invitation of the Iraqi Government and that their operations are essential to Iraq's political, economic, and social well-being.

We are anxious for the day when Iraqis can take control of their own destiny, but the Iraqis are suspicious of

our intentions and growing increasingly impatient. I have no illusions that a single amendment will somehow change the dynamics of events on the ground, but I believe we have a duty to proclaim and demonstrate through our deeds that we have no intention whatever of either maintaining permanent Iraqi military bases or controlling Iraqi oil.

If I may, I suggest what I proposed this past weekend, a third way on dealing with Iraq. Right now, we have basically two alternatives. The administration has a plan as to how not to lose but not one on how to win. Some of my friends in both parties believe the answer is to figure out how quickly we can pull out our forces. I want our forces out, but I also want to leave behind a stable Iraq so we need not go back in again.

Toward that end, I laid out a proposal. I want to make absolutely clear what it is not. It is not a proposal to partition Iraq. As a matter of fact, I respectfully suggest that the proposal I have laid out, and signed on by Les Gelb and others, is, in fact, the only way to avoid the partitioning of Iraq.

My fellow colleagues, we have gone from the major threat in Iraq being the insurgency to the major threat in Iraq being sectarian violence and a civil war. If you read the major press on Sunday, both the Washington Post and the New York Times have articles from well-respected reporters on the ground in Iraq saying that the nation is dangerously careening toward partition.

My proposal is designed to avoid partitioning. I believe, in order to be able to keep Iraq together and as a united government 5 years from now, we must give them breathing room now—breathing room now. The fact of the matter is, there is no plan on the administration's radar or anyone else's, for that matter, to deal with disbanding the militia or integrating the militia into the Iraqi military.

And, right now, a unity government—which is a necessary precondition for what I am talking about—a unity government, without a plan as to how to keep the Sunnis in the game, is one that is destined for failure.

We have had two unity governments already, and they have gotten us, quite frankly, nowhere. What makes anyone think because you no longer have Ibrahim al-Jaafari, who was disliked by the rest of non-Shiite Iraq, as prime minister that somehow the Sunnis are going to embrace a highly centralized Government, politically controlled by the Shia, and without any Sunni access to resources, and nothing being done about the death squads and the militia coming out of the Sadr camp and the Badr brigade, which has been trained, in part, by the Iranians? They are not likely to sign on.

So the proposal I have laid out, which I will not bore my colleagues with in detail, but I will submit for the RECORD, the proposal I have laid out

has five parts. I came to those conclusions based upon the following assessment: Nothing I propose is in any way contradictory to the existing Iraqi Constitution. Let me remind all my colleagues that the Iraqi Constitution, voted on last year by the Iraqi people, calls for the establishment—after a general election, which took place on December 15—of an Iraqi Government.

Once the Iraqi Government is established—and it must be established, now, by May 20—the Parliament will meet. The Iraqi Parliament will meet, and they will appoint a committee to make recommendations on amendments to the Constitution.

This process was made available because of the hard work of our Ambassador to Iraq. When they voted on the Constitution, you may remember, at the last minute, to save the deal, Zal was able to go out and get the following caveat put into their Constitution: that it was still able to be amended, particularly as it related to regionalism.

For the Sunnis feared, above all, that you would have these two autonomous provinces with all the oil—north and south—and they would be left without any resources in the middle and at the mercy of those two regions. That is why the present Constitution in Iraq calls for the possibility of amendment. And the amendments the administration has been calling for, I have been calling for, and everyone else, are amendments designed to get further Sunni buy-in. For everyone knows, unless the Sunnis buy in, the insurgency will not stop. If the insurgency is not quelled, continued sectarian violence will erupt. And already the genie is out of the bottle.

What has happened now is sectarian violence and ethnic cleansing is becoming a part of the political process in Iraq. In order to be able to stem that, there is a necessity, in my view, to get Sunni buy-in.

Everything has changed on the ground since my first trip to Iraq, right after Saddam's statue fell, with DICK LUGAR and with our colleague from Nebraska, CHUCK HAGEL.

At that time, the Sunni former Baathist insurgents believed, if they resisted, they could drive America out, and they could once again take control of the central government. They believed that Sunni domination, as existed the previous decades, was again achievable.

The Shia thought there was no possibility of them being able to dominate militarily, and they would have to be able to do that politically.

And the Kurds saw themselves as a semiautonomous region not caring much about anything else that happened as long as they maintained their autonomy.

What has happened in the last couple years? Well, what has happened in the last several months, when the mosque was blown up in the Shia area, it unleashed—it unleashed—sectarian violence. It unleashed it in a way that the